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LETTERS OF JOHN RUTLEDGE

Annotated by JOSEPH W. BARNWELL

(Continued from the April Number)

Cheraws Jan'y 24. 1781.⁽¹⁾

Gent.—

Inclosed, you'll receive an Acco^t of the late Action, between Col. Tarlton & the brave Gen^l. Morgan, in which, the former was totally defeated—The Gen^l. will send a more circumstantial one, & the Bearer, Major Giles,² who was in the engagem^t., will give you any particulars, which I may, in Haste, have omitted—I hope this fortunate Affair will produce some good Effects, but, our Friends must not be too sanguine, & conclude that We have, now, no Need of Assistance—Certainly this is a very handsome Check, but, nothing decisive—we have still many to fight, & great difficulties to encounter—This Country must be recovered, (if ever it is regained) Inch by Inch—The Enemy's pride will prevent their yeilding it, in any other Manner—Their Interest w^d. also hinder them, for they have experienced, & know full well, its value—I am persuaded, that Lord Cornwallis will, immediately, call hither, the Troops which are in Virginia³ but, what Succour We may have, from that State, to oppose them, is uncertain—probably very trifling—I am convinced, that the Enemy will not abandon the Country, & retreat to Charles-Town, untill it

¹ This letter marks a distinct period in the War in South Carolina, the period after the Battle of Cowpens. The tone of this and subsequent letters is never again gloomy almost to the point of despair. The overwhelming defeat of Tarleton, the most distinguished British cavalry leader in America, in a pitched battle, the presence of troops from other states and of officers like Morgan and Lee, and more than all, the master mind and hand of General Greene gave hope and confidence to the Carolinians and their gallant leaders, proportionately depressed the British and was reflected in the Governor's letters.

² Edward Giles of Maryland, Major and Aide to Morgan; Brevet Major Continental Army 9th March 1781 for services at Battle of Cowpens, Aide to Smallwood to the end of the War.

³ So evident was it to Cornwallis that he needed reinforcements, that he had even before Cowpens called for the troops from Virginia, and they had arrived in Charleston, and some of them under Leslie were already at Camden.

is, or about to be, besieged—nor, will they quit the Town, untill they can hold it no longer⁴—they are building a large, strong, Fort, at Hampstead, 2 Redoubts, one on each Side of the main Road, to be commanded by the Fort, & a Fort on Hangman's Point—To give the finishing Stroke to the Business, We must have considerable Support, both naval & military, from our Ally—Pray use your utmost Influence & Endeavours to obtain it speedily—why do the French Fleet & Army remain at Rhode Island? What is become of the second Division? I wish a Minister had been sent to France, last November or October—I can^t. account for such Condⁿ. & delays— & fear much, that this Year will pass away as the last did, with^t. any Thing of Consequence being done by us— I rec^d. on Saturday last, your Letters of Dec^r. 20 & 24th & observe what you mention, ab^t. a Proclamation, but, I w^d. have any which it might be proper to issue, carried into Effect, & the Time for so doing is not yet quite arrived—you will receive, by this opportunity, Copies of the Letters which have passed between Gen^l. Green & Lord Cornwallis—I can^t. see any material difference between the Letter which We charged him with writing to Balfour⁵, & what he acknowledges writing to Cruger—& if his Copy is genuine, the differences between that & our Copy are probably only clerical Errors, without design, for they certainly do not vary the Sense—I think his Lordship avows sufficient to establish his Character to be very different from what Sir H. Clinton declares it to be—However, pray have the Letters published, by order of Congress—his Lordship's Letters to Smallwood⁶ & Gen^l. Green are so open to Comments, that, without doubt, they will not escape many striking ones—I wish you w^d. send on Cloathing for the Troops now here as soon as possible,—& a Quantity of spare cloaths, w^{ch}. would, perhaps, procure Recruits—it is useless

⁴ They held it until December 14, 1782, almost up to the date of the signing of peace.

⁵ The letter of Cornwallis to Balfour is published in Spark's *Washington* (Vol. VII, p. 555), and that to Cruger in *The Cornwallis Correspondence* (Vol. I, p. 56).

⁶ William Smallwood, of Maryland, often mentioned in these letters; Brigadier General Continental Army, October 23, 1776; Major General North Carolina September 15, 1780; thanked by Congress for conduct at Battle of Camden, fought August 16, 1780; actively in command in North and South Carolina during the whole War; died February 14, 1792.

to send Men, naked, into the Field, many present are literally so, & consequently, unfit for any service—I have no Expectation, that the Garrison of Charles Town, (the Citizens at least, & particularly such as have been sent to S^t. Augustine,) will be relieved by any Exchange here—I am told by good authority, that Lord C. has declared he will not exchange 'em—you will, therefore, endeavour to effect an exchange, through the Negotiations between Gen^l. Washington & Clinton—tho' the prospect of that's terminating appears very distant,—Especially if it is to depend on the settlements of the Accounts for Prisoners on both sides—This will⁷ delay—If both parties are in Earnest, the Exchange need not be delayed, till a Settlement of Accounts, (for the delay will only add to the expense) but, Hostages might be given, to secure payment, of whatever, Ballance Commis^{rs} to be now appointed sh^d. liquidate—you will attend to, (& press this Matter,) & also to having our Prisoners, in C: Town, well supplied during their Captivity, if a release from it cannot be soon effected—sh^d. Overtures for Peace be made (of w^{ch}. I confess I have no Idea, in any short Time,) I assure myself, that the proposition of uti possidetis will be absolutely rejected, without a Moments Consideration * * * * —

Hillsboro. Feby.—10th. 1781.

Gent.—

on the 1st Inst., Lord Cornwallis crossed the Catawba, at McGowen's⁸ Ford, & our Troops, under Gen^l. Morgan, retreated to & crossed, the Yadkin, at the Ford at w^{ch}. the Enemy arrived, the next Evening—fortunately, the River was so high that they could not cross it—our Troops which were at Cheraws, by forced Marches, & after great Fatigue, (sev^l. wth. naked bleeding Feet, on stony Ground), effected a Junction, in the Evening of the 7th., wth. the other Cont^{ls}. at Guilford Court-House ab^t. 45 Miles from hence—where our Army was, Yesterday Morning, & I imagine they are still there—the Enemy lay, the night before last, at the shallow-ford on the Yadkin, ab^t. 40 Miles from our Army—

⁷ The bottom of the page of the original letter has been cut off, probably to obtain the signature of Governor Rutledge, which was on the other side of the sheet. A few words only are missing at this place and the signature at the end.

⁸ Cowan's Ford.

Gen^l. Davidson⁹ was killed on the Catawba—Sumpter is not well enough to take the field—Pickens has some militia, & is endeavouring to assemble more, in the Enemy's Rear—but, our Situation is truly critical, for, our Army is not strong enough to fight the Enemy's &, perhaps, they may not be able to avoid an action—should they be beaten the Consequence will be fatal—sh^d. they retreat & give up the Country, it may be difficult to recover what We hold, at present¹⁰—I am, however, satisfied that the Gen^l. will take the wisest part—but, what that will be, Circumstances must determine—our present prospect is however gloomy—it is reported, that the Pennsylv^a. Line are on their March to the Southw^d.—w^d. to God they were now here—The Face of affairs w^d. soon change—I wish they may not come too late—The Legislature of this State did not meet, till ab^t. the 26th. ult^o.—They are preparing a Bill to raise their quota of Continental Troops, for 20 Months, by draught, (if necessary,) ab^t. the Middle of March—such a Meas^o. sh^d. have been adopted last Sep^r.—ab^t. a Fortnight ago, Col. Lee surprised Geo: Town, took the Comd^t. Lieu^t. Col. Campbell, killed Major Irvin, & took sev^l. Pris^{rs}.—young Conyers a Brother of the Cap^t. lately, wth. 16 of our Militia, took 46 British Pris^{rs}., on the W. Side of Santee, wth. a considerable N^o. of Waggon^s & Horses, & a large Quantity of salt, & other Stores—He destroyed what he c^d. not bring off, & has conveyed his Pris^{rs}., in safety, to the Ew^d. of Pedee—Marion, by the last Acco^{ts} from him, was at or near Dorchester—He is destroying the Enemy's stores, down the Country, & breaking up their Quarters, in different places—this may have some good Effect & convince his Lordship that whilst he is making new Conquests, he is losing the old—C: burnt a gr^t. N^o. of his Waggon^s, & had prepared for a most

⁹ William Lee Davidson of North Carolina, Brigadier General January 9, 1779; killed at Cowan's Ford February 1, 1781, resisting the passage of Cornwallis' Army. It is maintained in North Carolina that it was not the rising of the Catawba but the skillful distribution of Davidson's forces which delayed the crossing of his Lordship (Schenk's *North Carolina*, p. 240).

¹⁰ Fortunately the Battle of Guilford Court House in North Carolina, March 15, 1781, although a technical defeat of General Greene by Cornwallis, resulted in the latter's retreat and the return of General Greene to South Carolina with most favorable results. Rutledge's well founded confidence in General Greene, expressed here, remained to the end, and General Greene reciprocated it, expressing the highest opinion of him.

rapid March, but, a heavy Rain swelled the River, & checked his Progress—Ab^t. 12 days ago, three or 400 British Troops took possession of Wilmington—6 of the Town's People left it, the rest rec^d. the Enemy wth. 3 Huzzas—I refer you to the Gen^l's dispatches to Congress, for further particulars—the express being anxious to proceed, I will not detain him longer, than to press my repeated recommendations, that you will exert yourselves with unremit^ted attempt^s. to procure speedy, & effectual aid for the Compleat Recovery of the Southern States, I am wth. great Esteem Gent. yr. most obed^t. Ser^t. J: Rutledge
The Deleg. of S^o. Carolina.

Camp on Haw River
March 8. 1781

Gent.—

Since my last to you from Hillsbor^o. I have rec^d. several of your favours, but will say nothing, on the subject of 'em, at present, as I purpose to set off, the day after To Morrow,¹¹ for Philad^a. having made the necessary military Arrangem^{ts}. for S^o. Carolina, not seeing the prospect of getting into that Country, being unable in the present Circumstances of affairs to render any service to it, by staying here, &, the Gen^l. thinking I may, perhaps by going Northwardly, I have determined to comply wth. his Wishes—& shall be happy if I can effect them—But, my Journey will be very tedious, for I must supply myself, with some Horses on the Road, (my own being worn down) & I shall call on the Governors of N^o. Carolina, Virginia, & Maryland, in my way, to represent the Situation of Matters, w^{ch}. I believe is very differ^t. from what People think 'em—However, I am persuaded, that if Congress & France are disposed to extricate the Southern States, from their present distress, they soon may—I hope to find such a disposition—our Army recrossed the Dan this day Fortnight, & have been sv^l. days, & now are, within twelve Miles of Cornwallis's, but we

¹¹ This was the second visit of the Governor to the North. He was there after the fall of Charleston and the destruction of Buford's force on May 29, 1780. He returned and was in North Carolina certainly just after the defeat of Gates. The letter shows that the second visit of the Governor to Philadelphia was in consequence of the wish of General Greene, although the letter quoted by General McCrady (Vol. 1780-83, p. 139) from the Governor to Sumter does not mention this as one of the reasons for his visit.

shall move presently—Nothing, of any Consequence, has happen'd between the two Armies—

I am with great Esteem

Gent. yr. most obed^t. Ser^t.

J: Rutledge

P.S.

I hope the Pennsylvania Line are far avanced, on their March to join the Southern Army.

High Hills of Santee

August 6. 1781

Gent.—

This will be delivered by Col^o. Thomson¹² to whom I refer you, for a full Acc^t.—of matters this Way¹³—I have issued Commissions of the Peace, & qualified some Magistrates, for each district—I have also circulated a Proclamation agst. plundering, which has prevailed to a great-degree & I am in hopes We shall put an immediate Stop to it—I wd. have issued special Commissions of Oyer & Terminer, to hold Courts in the several Districts, but, for want of the Judges & Attorney Gen^l., Business could not be conducted, as well as I wd. wish to have it—I have wrote by this opportunity requesting 'em to come on, immediately, & shall postpone issuing the Commissions, untill their Arrival, unless they make a longer Stay than I hope they will, in which case I must make Temporary Appointments to these offices, but, this, I hope they will render unnecessary, by coming soon—I think the Circumstances of the State admit of electing a Legislature, but, as it wd. be ungenerous to exclude our worthy Friends lately Prisoners in St. Augus^o. & C: Town, from a Share in the Legis-

¹² Col. William Thomson (probably) who commanded at the east end of Sullivans Island during the attack on Fort Moultrie; Colonel of the 3rd Regiment Continental Establishment, and after his resignation Colonel of State Militia (*This Magazine*, Vol. 3, page 102).

¹³ Governor Rutledge had left Greene's Army in March, 1781, on his second trip to Philadelphia and set out on his return to South Carolina June 28, 1781. After an illness in July he arrived at Greene's headquarters shortly before the date of this letter. During his absence the Battle of Guilford Court House had been fought, the Battle of Hobkirk Hill with Rawdon April 25, 1781, and no enemy's posts remained North of Orangeburg. The time had arrived to restore civil government and the Governor was actively entering upon this work.

lature, (w^{ch} might probably be the Case if one was immediately called,) & injurious to the publick, to deprive it of their Abilities & Services,¹⁴ I have determined to postpone issuing Writs of election, for awhile, & untill they, or most of 'em, arrive—However, several Laws are absolutely necessary, & the having the Legislative, as well as the Executive & Judicial, Authority operating, in its full & proper extent, throughout the State, w^d. have a great Effect, on our Affairs particularly abroad—I therefore wish most anxiously, to have an Assembly elected, & sitting, as soon as possible—You will be pleased to press the Gentlemen of the Council, & such other Gent:, with you, as were members of the last Assembly, or are of weight & Influence in the Country, to come hither, with the utmost Expedition—I imagine the Gent: of the Council have already set out, & therefore I do not write to them—However you will communicate this Matter to 'em, if still with you, & to such other Gent. as are at, or near Philadelphia—Pray have 'em accomodated, with what may be necessary for bringing 'em on—any Expense, on that Score, shall be speedily reimbursed, by Means of Indigo which I hope to be able to send soon to Philadelphia—We are in very great Want of Arms—I request therefore that you will not fail to procure, & send on, (if they are not already sent,) the Arms and other Articles ab^t. w^{ch}. I wrote to you by Phil: Will, the day I left Philad^a.—& pray forward the Cloathing w^{ch}. Gillon may bring, as soon as possible, & inform me, what other Articles his Cargo consists of—I request to hear from you, by every opportunity, & to receive the earliest Intelligence, of all material occurrences, particularly European—

I am with great Regard

Gent. yr. most obed^t. Ser^t.

J: Rutledge

P. S. be pleased to send me 4 or 5 Setts of the Articles of Confederation, Treaties wth. France, Constitutions etc, w^{ch} are bound up together in a Volume.

The Delegates of So. Carolina

Congaree, Mrs. Mottes, Septem^r 7th. 1781

Gentlemen—

I request that you will send as soon as posible, either by Express

¹⁴ The aid of these patriotic citizens was certainly made use of when the Legislature finally assembled at Jacksonboro in January, 1782.

to the Marquis de la Fayette, with a request that he would forward them to me, with the utmost Expedition, or, by Express directly to me, all the Resolutions of Congress which it may be necessary to lay before the Legislature—probably they may not arrive by the Time one may be convened, but, they may come before it adjourns—at any rate: However, send them as quickly as you can—I dont recollect any which will be wanted, except the Resolve recommending the States to empower Congress to lay a Duty of five pr. Cent on all Imports, but there may be others which require the Legislature's deliberation—you will send all such—also the Act of Assembly passed by Pennsylvania in consequence of the Recommendation of Congress about the five p Cent Duty—Be pleased to send, likewise, all the News Papers from the time I left Philadelphia (28th June) to the time of the Express coming away, & continue to forward the papers, regularly, by every opportunity—During my late Illness, all those which you sent, to the 28th July, were carried away by Visitors—I know not by whom,—We must look to the Pennsylvania Gazettes, as the Fountain of Intelligence and the Ground Work of those which We shall, I hope, soon put forth—Walsh is gone Northwardly, but I have heard of an other Printer at George Town, to whom I have sent—If we can get him, the Press shall be put to work immediately, Col. Motte will have our Military News from Mr. Dart—

I am Gent. yr. most obed^t. Ser^t.

J: Rutledge

The Delegates of S^o. Carolina.

Mrs. Motte's Congaree Sep. 9. 1781

Gent.—

As reports will, probably, give you before, or about, the Time, this may get to Hand, a confused, &, perhaps, a false, Account of the Battle which was fought, yesterday, at Eutaw, between Gen^l Greene, & the British Army, under Col^o Stuart, to prevent an undue Impression from these reports, &, as, without Doubt, Congress will be desirous to have the best, & Earliest Intelligence of this Glorious Victory, I think proper to give you what Information We have of it, but, you'll be pleased to observe, that I do so, merely, for the Satisfaction of Congress, yourselves, & our Friends,

& therefore you will take Care that it be not printed, or published—this I must insist on, because, you will shortly receive an authentick official Acc^t of the Affair.

No. 1 is a Copy of the Generals Letter which I rec^d this Afternoon: Col^o Otho Williams, in a Letter dated at Burdells, this day at Noon, says, “Lee’s, Marion’s, & Maham’s, Horse are, manoueuering about the Enemy, who, have drawn into their Post, at Eutaw, a strong Picket, which had been advanced a Mile from it” The action began Early yesterday Morn^g & lasted about 2 Hours & a half—the Militia, under Marion, & Pickens fired 17 Rounds p Man.

No. 2 is such a list as We have obtained of the killed & Wounded, but, I believe there are some Names to be added to it—I don^t hear of the Enemy’s having taken any other Prisoner than Col^o Washington—whose Corps charged, thrice, thro’ their Infantry, whilst unbroken—all Washingtons officers were wounded, except Cap^t Parsons—all our wounded are brought off—260 of the Pris^{ns} have just passed this Way, & are sent over McCords Ferry—the rest are so badly Wounded, that they must come on, slowly—The force was pretty nearly equal, on both sides—If any Superiority the Enemy had it—A British Officer, Prisoner, tells me, they had 2000—all Regulars—a considerable part of ours were Militia—ab^t 180 of them No. Carolinians, under Col^o Malmady,¹⁵ 360 under Marion, 280 under Pickens, & ab^t 200 State Troops (in the Action) under Col^o Henderson,¹⁶ who commanded them in the Illness & Absence of Gen^l Sumpter—our Men, it is true have suffer’d, amazingly, but that must have been expected in such a Conflict, However, they are in the highest Spirits, & ready for another Action—I am in hopes the Gen^l will be able, if he can draw the Enemy out of their strong Hold (the large Brick House at Eutaw w^{ch} they certainly can’t occupy long) to follow up, & improve this Victory, & give the finishing Stroke to their possessing

¹⁵ Col. Francis Malmady (Marquis de), a French officer of the Continental Army commanding for the time North Carolina Militia.

¹⁶ Col. William Henderson, a gallant and capable officer; Major of the Rifle Regiment captured at the surrender of Charleston; exchanged at the time of the general exchange of prisoners in August, 1781 and afterwards in command of Sumter’s Brigade of state troops during the latter’s illness; afterwards appointed Brigadier General.

the Country, by destroying the remains of their Army, at Eutaw, who must be exceedingly dispirited—at any rate, however, if they sh^d be so fortunate as to get off, by a rapid Moon Light March they must commit their numerous wounded, to his Mercy—you will hear from the General, as soon as he has closed the Scene with Mr. Stuart—in the mean Time, this may serve the purpose above ment^d—I am Gent

yr: very hble Ser^t

J: Rutledge

P.S.

Mond. Mornng 8 o'Clock—I've just seen a Man who left the ground on which the Battle was fought, at 3 P.M., Yesterday—He says the Enemy's dead & wounded were then on the Field & that our Horse were close to it—I don't know how far, however, this may be Fact—

The Delegates of S^o Carolina in Congress

Dear Sir—

We have had a most Obstinate and Bloody action—Victory was ours—We drove the Enemy, more than four Miles—We took between three and four hundred prisoners, and had it not been, for the large Brick-Building at the Eutaw Spring, and the peculiar kind of Brush that surrounds it, we should have taken the whole Army prisoners—Nothing could exceed the Bravery of the Maryland & Virginia Troops—the North Carolinians behaved as well as could be expected from Young Soldiers. The Militia under Marion, Pickens, & Malmedy, did honor to this class of Soldiers—Washington, Lee, & Henderson with the State Troops exhibited instances of Heroism—Our loss is considerable, but, the Enemy's is great, not less than five or six hundred, killed and Wounded—The want of Cartridges and the strength of the Enemy's position prevented me from attempting to push our advantage farther—We are now sending off our wounded, and taking Measures to oblige the Enemy to leave their position, or surrender in it—Washington had his horse killed, under him, and, being among the Enemy, was taken prisoner—

most respectfully Yours,

N: Greene

My peculiar Situation, and the manner in which I write, will
 Apologize for not giving you a more particular Acco^t
 Burdell's House,
 6 Miles from Eutaw
 Sept^r 9, 1781
 His Excelency Governor Rutledge at Mrs. Mottes.

*A List of the Killed and Wounded, in the Action of the 8th inst. at Eutaw
 Spring, viz.^t*

Maryland Line Reg ^t .		State Troops of So. Carolina	
Cap ^t . Edely	Missing	Major Rutherford	Killed
Cap ^t . Dobson	Killed	Lieu ^t . Polk	ditto
Lieu ^t . Duvall	ditto		
		(Leg Broke)	
Lieu ^t . Gould	ditto	Lieut. Col. Henderson	wounded
(Slight) Col ^o . Howard	wounded	Capt. Moore	do
Cap ^t . Hugo	ditto	Martin	do
Lieu ^t . Ewing	ditto	Lieu ^t . Losk	do
		(Slight)	
Lieu ^t . Woolford	ditto	General Pickens	do
Lieu ^t . Linn	ditto		
(Arm Broke) Brigade Major Gibson	ditto		
(Mortally) Lieu ^t . Capon, of Artillery,	do		
		Our loss in killed & Wounded	
Virginia Line		(of Privates,) Continental &	
		Militia) does not (it's said)	
Col ^o . Campbell	Killed	exceed three hundred—we have	
Cap ^t . Morgan	ditto	no Returns of the killed &	
		Wounded Officers, of the N Caro	
Lieu ^t . McGuire of Art ^y .	ditto	Line—neither of the N ^o . & S ^o .	
		Caro: Militia Officers except Viz.	
Cap ^t . Oldham	Wounded		
(slight) Brigade Major Edmonds, do		Col ^o . Hugh Horry	Wounded
		Cap ^t . Boone	ditto
do Lieu ^t . Phynn, Artillery	do		
do Lieu ^t . Drew	do do		
	Cavalry		
	1 st . or Col ^o . White's Reg ^t .		
(Bad) Cap ^t . Watts	Wounded		
	3 ^d . or Baylors Reg ^t .		
Lieu ^t . Col ^o . Washington (slightly wounded & Prisoner)			
(Slight) Lieu ^t . Ambrose Gordon (wounded)			
Lieu ^t . James Simons, (do in two places)			
(slight) Lieu ^t . King	do		
(Mortal) Cornet Stuart	do		

